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OF "OURS."

No. 6

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CHAPTER XXIII.

A SURPRISE.

I WAS sitting one evening alone in my quarters, an open volume before me, in which I persuaded myself I was reading, while my thoughts were far otherwise engaged, when my comrade Tascher suddenly entered the room, and throwing himself into a chair, exclaimed in a tone of passionate impatience—

"*Pardieu!* it is a fine thing to be nephew to the first man in France!"

"What has happened?" said I, when I perceived that he stopped short without explaining farther.

"What has happened!—enough to drive one mad. Just hear this. You know how fond I am of Paris, and how naturally I must wish to be near the Tuileries, where I have the *entrée* to my aunt's soirees. Well, there was a vacancy occurred yesterday in the *huitième* hussars—a corps always stationed here or at Versailles—and as I am longing to have a cavalry grade, I waited on Madame Bonaparte to solicit her interest in my favour. She promised of course. The general was to breakfast with her, and it was all settled: she was to ask him for the promotion; and I had not a doubt of success. In fact, if I must confess, I told two or three of my friends, and actually received their congratulations. It so fell out, however, that he did not come to breakfast, nor dinner either—there's no knowing that man; but what think you, he walked in, this evening, just as we were preparing to act a proverb. Such a scene as it was, to be sure. No one expected him. Most of us were dressed up in costumes of one kind or other; and I, *Ma foi!* ridiculous enough, I suppose—I was costumed like a galley-slave. He stood for a second or two at the door with his arms folded, and his stern eyes wandering over the whole room. There was not one amongst us would not have wished himself many a mile away: even my aunt herself seemed quite confused, and blushed, and grew pale, and blushed again.

"'Ha!' cried he at last, in his dry, short voice. 'Pardon, ladies and gentlemen, I have made a mistake—I believed I was in the palace of the Tuileries, and I find this is the Porte St. Martin.'

"'*Fi donc*, Bonaparte,' cried my aunt, blushing, while with one of her sweetest smiles she endeavoured to bring him back to good humour. 'See how you have frightened Madame de Narbonne—she'll never be able to play the miller's wife; and Marie here, her tears will wash away all her rouge.'

"'And this amiable gentleman—what is to become of him?' said

he, interrupting her, while he laid his hand on my shoulder, and I stood trembling like a culprit beside him.

"'Ah, there!—that's Tascher,' said she laughingly; and as if happy to escape from her greater embarrassment by any means, she continued—'Your question comes indeed quite apropos. I have a request to make in his favour: there's a vacancy in the *huitième*, I think it is—eh, Edward?' I nodded slightly, for if my life depended on it, I could not have uttered a word. 'Now, I am sure he's been sous-lieutenant long enough, and in the infantry too.'

"'Can you ride well, sir?' said he, turning to me with a half frown on his pale face.

"'Yes, general,' replied I, with my heart almost choking me as I spoke.

"'Well, sir, you shall be employed, and in a service worthy your present tastes, if I may judge from your costume. A detachment of prisoners is to march to-morrow from this for the bagne de Brest—hold yourself in readiness to accompany the military escort. Go, sir, and report yourself to your colonel.' He waved his hand when he had finished, and how I left the room, reached the street, and found myself here, hang me if I can tell you."

"And is there no help for this? must you really go?" said I, compassionating the dejected and sorrow-struck expression of the youth.

"Must I go! *Ma foi!* you know little of this dear uncle of mine, if you ask such a question. When once his mind's made up, any thing like an attempt to argue only confirms his resolve. The best thing now is, to obey and say nothing; for if my aunt remonstrates, I may spend my life in garrison there over the galley-slaves."

A knocking at the outer door interrupted our conversation at this moment, and a corporal of the staff entered, with a despatch-bag at his waist.

"Sous-Lieutenant Tascher," said he, touching his cap, and presenting a large official-looking letter to my companion, who threw it from him on the table, and turned away to hide his confusion. "Monsieur Burke," said the corporal, withdrawing another ominous document from his leathern pouch.

"*Diantre!*" cried Tascher, turning quickly about—"have I got you into a scrape as well as myself. I remember now the general asked me who was my 'comrade.'"

I took the paper with a trembling hand, and tore it open. The first line was all I could read; it was a war-office official, appointing me to the vacant commission in the *huitième* hussars.

Tascher's hand shook as he leaned on my shoulder, and I could feel a convulsive twitching of his fingers as his agitation increased; but in a second or two he recovered his self-command, and taking my hand within both of his, he said, while the large tears were starting from his eyes—

"I'm glad it's you, Burke," and then turned away, unable to say more.

It was some time before I could bring myself to credit my good

fortune. Had I been free to choose, I could have desired nothing better nor more to my liking; and when I succeeded at length, then came my embarrassment at my poor friend's disappointment, which must have been still more poignant as contrasted with my success. Tascher, however, had all the creole warmth of temperament. The first burst over, he really enjoyed the thought of my promotion; and we sat up the entire night talking over plans for the future, and making a hundred resolves for contingencies, some of which never arose, and many, when they came, suggested remedies of their own.

At daybreak my comrade's horses came to the door, and a mounted orderly attended to accompany him to the prison where the convoy were assembled. We shook hands again and again. He was leaving what had been his home for years, Paris—the gay and brilliant city, in whose pleasures he had mixed, and whose fascinations he had tasted. I was parting from one with whom I had lived in a friendship as close as can subsist between two natures essentially different—we both were sad.

"Adieu, Burke," said he, as he waved his hand for the last time. "I hope you'll command the *huitième* when next we meet."

I hurried into the quarters, which already seemed lonely and deserted, so soon does desolation throw its darkening shadow before it. The sword that had hung above the chimney crosswise on my own was gone; the chako, too, and the pistols were missing; the vacant chair stood opposite to mine; and the isolation I felt became so painful, that I wandered out into the open air, glad to escape the sight of objects, every one of which only suggested how utterly alone I stood in the world, when the departure of one friend had left me companionless.

No one save he who has experienced it can form any just idea of the intense hold a career of any kind will take of the mind of him, who, without the ties of country, of kindred, and of friends, devotes all his energies in one direction. The affections that might, under other influences, have grown up—the hopes that might have flourished in the happy sphere of a home, become the springs of a more daring ambition. In proportion as he deserts other roads in life, the path he has struck out for himself seems wider and grander, and his far-seeing eye enables him to look into the long distance with a prophetic vision, where are rewards for his hard-won victories, the recompense of long years of toil. The pursuit, become a passion, gradually draws all into its vortex; and that success which at first he believed only attainable by some one mighty effort, seems at last to demand every energy of his life and every moment of his existence; and as the miser would deem his ruin near, should the most trifling opportunity of gain escape him, so does the ambitious man feel that every incident in life must be made tributary to the success which is his mammon. It was thus I thought of the profession of arms; my whole soul was in it; no other wish, no other hope divided my heart; that passion reigned there alone. How often do we find it in life, that the means become the end—that the effort we employ to reach an object takes hold upon our fancy—gains hourly on our affections, and at length usurps the

place of what before had been our idol. As a boy, liberty, the bold assertion of my country's rights, stirred my heart, and made me wish to be a soldier. As years rolled on, the warlike passion sank deeper and deeper in my nature; the thirst for glory grew upon me, and forgetting all save that, I longed for the time when on the battle-field I should win my way to fame and honour. In this wise were my musings, as I loitered homeward and entered my quarters, a sealed packet addressed Sous-Lieutenant Burke—how that humble title made my heart beat—lay on my table. Supposing it referred to my new appointment, I sat down to con it over at my leisure; but no sooner had I torn open the envelope than a card fell to the ground. I took it up hastily and read:—"*D'apres l'ordre de Madame Bonaparte j'ai l'honneur de vous inviter à une soirée* ——." What! cried I aloud—*me!* invite *me* to the palace! There must be some mistake here; and I turned again to the envelope, where my name was legibly written, with my grade, and the number of my new corps There could be no doubt of it, and yet was it still inexplicable; I that was so perfectly alone, a stranger, without a friend, save among the humble ranks of the school, how came such a distinction as this to be conferred on me. I thought of Tascher; but then we had lived months together, and such a thing had never been even alluded to. The more I reflected on it, the greater became my difficulty; and in a maze of confusion and embarrassment I passed the day in preparation for the evening, for, as was customary at the period, the invitations for small parties were issued on the very mornings themselves. My first care was, to look after the uniform of my new corps, in which I knew I must appear. My last remaining bank-note, the sole survivor of my little stock of wealth, was before me, and I sat calculating with myself the costly outlay of a hussar dress, the full uniform of which had not till now entered into my computation. Never was my ingenuity more sorely tried than in the endeavour to bring the outlay within the narrow limits of my little purse; and when, at length, I would think that all had been remembered, some small but costly item would rise up against me, and disconcert all my calculations.

At noon I set out to wait on my new colonel, whose quarters were in the Place Vendôme. The visit was a short and not over pleasant one; a crowd of officers filled the rooms, among whom I edged my way with difficulty towards the place where Colonel Marbois was standing. He was a short, thick-set, vulgar-looking man of about fifty; his moustache and whiskers meeting above the lip, and his bushy, black beard below, gave him the air of a pioneer, which his harsh Breton accent did not derogate from.

"*Ah c'est vous*," said he, as my name was announced: "you'll have to learn in future, sir, that officers of your rank are not received at the levees of their colonel. You hear me; report yourself to the *Chef d'escadron*, however, who will give you your orders; and mark me, sir, let this be the last day you are seen in that uniform."

A short and not very gracious nod concluded the audience, and I took my leave not the less abashed, that I could mark a kind of half

smile on most of the faces about me as I withdrew from the crowd. Scarcely in the street, however, when my heart felt light and my step elastic. I was a *sous*-lieutenant of hussars, and if I did my duty what cared I for the smiles and frowns of my colonel; and had not the General Bonaparte himself told me, "that no grade was too high for the brave man who did so."

I can scarcely avoid a smile even yet as I call to mind the awe I felt on entering the splendid shop of Monsieur Crillaç, the fashionable tailor of those days, whose plate-glass windows and showy costumes formed the standing point for many a lounger around the corner of the Rue de Richelieu and the Boulevard. His saloon, as he somewhat ostentatiously called it, was a rendezvous for the idlers of a fashionable world, who spent their mornings canvassing the last gossip of the city, and devising new extravagancies in dress. The morning papers, caricatures, prints of fashions, patterns of waistcoats, and new devices for buttons were scattered over a table, round which, in every attitude of indolence and ease, were stretched some dozen of the exquisites of the period, engaged in that species of half-*ennui*, half-conversation, that form a considerable part of the existence of your young men of fashion of every age and every country. Their frock-coats of light cloth, high-collared, and covered with buttons; their *bottes-a-revers* reaching only mid leg, and met there by a tight *pantalon collant;* their hair studiously brushed back off their foreheads, and worn long, though not in *queue* behind, bespoke them as the most accurate types of the mode.

The appearance of a youth in the simple uniform of the Polytechnique in such a place seemed to excite universal astonishment. Such a phenomenon apparently had never been witnessed before; and as they turned fully round to stare at me, it was clear they never deemed that any mark of rudeness could be felt by one so humble as I was. Monsieur Crillaç himself, who was sipping his glass of *eau sucré* with one arm leaning on the chimney-piece, never deigned to pay me other attention than a half smile, as with a voice of most patronizing softness he lisped out—

"What can we do for you here, monsieur?"

Apparently the answer to this question was a matter of interest to the party, who suddenly ceased talking to listen.

"I wish to order a uniform," said I, summoning up all my resolution not to seem abashed. "This is a tailor's, if I don't mistake."

"Monsieur is quite correct," replied the imperturbable proprietor, whose self-satisfied smile became still more insulting, "but perhaps not exactly what you seek for. Gentlemen who wear your cloth seldom visit us."

"No, Crillaç," interrupted one of the bystanders; "I never heard that you advertised yourself as fashioner to the Polytechnique, or tailor in ordinary to the corps of Pompiers."

"You are insolent, sir," said I, turning fiercely round upon the speaker. The words were scarce spoken, when the party sprung to their legs; some endeavouring to restrain the temper of the young

man addressed, others, pressing around, called on me to apologize on the spot for what I had said.

"No, no; let us have his name—his name," said three or four in a a breath. "Beauvais will take the punishment into his own hands."

"Be advised, young gentleman; unsay your words, and go your way," said an elder one of the party, while he added, in a whisper, "Beauvais has no equal in Paris with the small sword."

"There is my address," said I, seizing a pen, and writing on a piece of paper before me.

"Ha!" said Beauvais, as he threw his eye on the writing, "he has got his grade it seems—all the better that; I half shrunk from the ridicule of an affair with a cadet. So you are serious about this."

"Sir!" said I; all my efforts being barely enough to repress my rising passion.

"Well, well, enough about it. To-morrow morning—the Bois de Boulogne—the rapier: you understand me, I suppose."

I nodded, and was about to leave the place, when I remembered that, in my confusion, I had neither asked my antagonist's name nor rank. "And you, sir," said I, "may I have the honour to learn who you are?"

"*Pardieu!* my young friend," cried one of the others, "the information will not strengthen your nerves; but if you will have it, he is the Marquis de Beauvais, and tolerably well known in that little locality where he expects to meet you to-morrow."

"Till then, sir," replied I, touching my cap, as I turned into the street—not, however, before a burst of laughter rung through the party at a witticism of which I was the object, and the latter part of which only could I catch. It was Beauvais who spoke. "In which case, Crillaç, another artist must take his measure." The allusion could not be mistaken, and, I confess, I did not relish it like the others.

I should, I fear, have fallen very low in the estimate of my companions and associates, could the real state of my heart at that moment have been laid open to them. It was, I freely own, one of great depression. But an hour ago, and life was opening before me with many a bright and cheerful hope; and now, in an instant, was my fortune clouded. Let me not be misunderstood: among the rules of the Polytechnique duelling was strictly forbidden; and although numerous transgressions occurred, so determined was the head of the government to put down the practice, that the individuals thus erring were either reduced in rank, or their promotion stopped for a considerable period; while the personal displeasure of General Bonaparte rarely failed to show itself with reference to them. Now, it was clear to me that some unknown friend, some secret well-wisher, had interested himself in my humble fate—that I owed my newly-acquired rank to his kindness and good offices. What then might I not be forfeiting by this unhappy rencontre? Was it not more than likely that such an instance of misconduct, the very day of my promotion, might determine the whole tenor of my future career? What misrepresentation might not gain currency about my conduct? These were sad reflections indeed, and every moment but increased them.

When I reached the college, I called on one of my friends; but not finding him in his quarters, I wrote a few lines, begging he would come over to me the moment he returned. This done, I sat down alone, to think over my adventure, and devise, if I could, some means to prevent its publicity, or if not that, its being garbled and misstated. Hour after hour rolled past, my wandering thoughts took no note of time, and the deep-tolled bell of the Polytechnique struck eight before I was aware the day was nearly over. Nine was the hour mentioned on my card of invitation: it flashed suddenly on me. What was to be done? I had no uniform, save that of the "*ecole.*" Such a costume in such a place would, I feared, be considered too ridiculous; yet to absent myself altogether was impossible. Never was I in such a dilemma. All my endeavours to rescue myself were fruitless; and at last, worn out with the conflict of my doubts and fears, I stepped into the fiacre and set out for the palace.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE "PAVILION DE FLORE."

As my humble carriage slackened its pace to a walk on approaching the Place Carousel, I for the first time perceived that the open space around was thronged with equipages, moving slowly along in line towards the gate of the palace. A picquet of dragoons was drawn up at the great archway, and mounted *gens d'armes* rode up and down to preserve order in the crowd. Before me stretched the long *façade* of the Tuileries, now lighted up in its entire extent. The rich hangings and costly furniture could be seen, even where I was.

What a sinking sense of shame overwhelmed me as I thought of my humble position amid that mighty concourse of all that was great and illustrious in France!—and how I shrunk within myself as I thought of the poor scholar of the Polytechnique, for such my dress proclaimed me, mixing with the most distinguished diplomates and generals of Europe. The rebuke I had met with from my colonel in the morning was still fresh in my recollection, and I dreaded something like a repetition of it.

Oh! why had I not known that this was a grand reception? was the ever-rising thought of my mind. My card of invitation said a *soirée:* even that I might have dared; but here was a regular levee. Already I was near enough to hear the names announced at the foot of the grand staircase, where ambassadors, senators, ministers of state,

and officers of the highest rank, succeeded each other in quick succession. My carriage stood now next but two. I was near enough to see the last arrival hand his card to the *huissier* in waiting, and hear his title called out, "Le Ministre de la Guerre," when the person in the carriage before me cried to his coachman—"To the left—the Pavilion de Flore," and at the same moment the carriage turned from the line, and drove rapidly towards a distant wing of the palace.

"Move up! move up!" shouted a dragoon, "or are you for the *soirée de Madame?*"

"Yes, yes!" said I hastily, as I heard his question.

"Follow that carriage, then," said he, pointing with his sabre; and in a moment we left the dense file, and followed the sounds of the retiring wheels towards a dark corner of the palace, where a single lamp over a gate was the only light to guide us. Never shall I forget the sense of relief I felt as I lay back in the carriage, and listened to the hum and din of the vast crowd growing each moment fainter. "Thank heaven," said I, "it's no levee." Scarce half a dozen equipages stood around the door as we drove up, and a single dragoon was the guard of honour.

"Whom shall I announce, sir?" said a *huissier* in black, whose manner was as deferential as though my appearance bespoke an ambassador. I gave my name, and followed him up a wide stair, where the deep velvet carpet left no foot-fall audible. A large bronze candelabra, supporting a blaze of wax-lights, diffused a light like day on every side. The doors opened before us as if by magic, and I found myself in an antechamber, where the *huissier*, repeating my name to another in waiting, retired. Passing through this, we entered a small drawing-room, in which sat two persons engaged at a chess-table, but who never looked up, or noticed us, as we proceeded. At last the two wings of a wide folding-door were thrown open, and my name was announced in a low but audible voice.

The *salon* into which I now entered was a large and splendidly-furnished apartment, whose light, tempered by a species of *abat-jour*, gave a kind of soft mysterious effect to every thing about, and made even the figures, as they sat in little groups, appear something almost dramatic in their character. The conversation, too, was maintained in a half-subdued tone—a gentle murmur of voices, that, mingling with the swell of music in another and distant apartment, and the plash of a small fountain in a vase of gold-fish in the room itself, made a strange but most pleasing assemblage of sounds. Even in the momentary glance which, on entering, I threw around me, I perceived that no studied etiquette or courtly stateliness prevailed. The guests were disposed in every attitude of lounging ease and careless *abandon;* and it was plain to see that all, or nearly all, about, were intimates of the place.

As the door closed behind me, I stood half uncertain how to proceed. Unhappily, I knew little of the habitudes of the great world; and every step I took was a matter of difficulty.

"I think you will find Madame Bonaparte in that room," said a

middle-aged and handsome man, whose mild voice and gentle smile did much to set me at my ease; "but perhaps you don't know her."

I muttered something I meant to be a negative, to which he immediately replied—

"Then let me present you. There is no ceremony here, and I shall be your groom of the chambers—but here she is. Madame la Consulesse, this young gentleman desires to make his respects."

"Ha! our friend of the Polytechnique—Monsieur Burke, is it not?"

"Yes, madame," said I, bowing low, and blushing deeply as I recognised, in the splendidly-attired and beautiful person before me, the lady who so kindly held the water to my lips the day of my accident at the school.

"Why, they told me you were promoted—a hussar, I think."

"Yes, madame—but—but——"

"You are too fond of old associations to part from them easily," said she, laughing. "Come here, Stephanie, and see a miracle of manhood, that could resist all the *clinquant* of a hussar, for the simple costume of the Ecole Militaire. Monsieur de Custine, this is my young friend of whom I told you the other day."

The gentleman, the same who had so kindly noticed me, bowed politely.

"And now I must leave you together, for I see they are teasing poor Madame Lefebvre;" and with a smile she passed on into a small *boudoir*, from which the sounds of merry laughter were proceeding.

"You don't know any one here?" said Monsieur de Custine, as he motioned me to a place beside him on a sofa; "nor is there any very remarkable person here to point out to you this evening. The first consul's levee absorbs all the celebrities—but by-and-by they will drop in to pay their respects, and you'll see them all. The handsome woman yonder with her fan before her, is Madame Beauharnois Lavalette, and the good-looking young fellow in the staff uniform is Monsieur de Melcy, a step-son of General Rapp."

"And the large handsome man with the embroidered coat who passed through so hurriedly?"

"Yes, he is somebody—that's Decrès, the Ministre de le Marine—he is gone to the levee; and there, next the door, with his eyes cast down, and his hands folded, that is the Abbé Maynal, one of the most 'spirituel' men of the day; but I suppose you'd much rather look at the beauties of the court than hear long stories about literature and politics; and there is the gem of loveliness among them."

I turned my eyes as he spoke, and close beside me, engaged in an eager conversation with an old lady, stood a young and most beautiful girl. Her long hair, through which, in the then mode, violets were wreathed and interwoven, descended in rich masses of curl over a neck white as marble. The corsage of her dress, which, in imitation of Greek costume, was made low, displayed her well-rounded shoulders to the greatest advantage; and though rather below, than above the middle size, there was a dignity and grace in the air of her figure, and a cer-

tain elegance about her slightest movements, that was most fascinating.

"And the 'Rose de Provence'—how is she this evening?" said my companion, rising suddenly, and presenting himself with a smile before her.

"Ah, you here, Monsieur de Custine? we thought you had been at Nancy."

The accent, the tone of voice in which she said these few words sent a thrill through me, and as I looked again, I recognized the young lady who stood at Madame Bonaparte's side on the memorable day of my fall. Perhaps my astonishment made me start; for she turned round towards me, and with a soft and most charming smile saluted me.

"How they are laughing in that room," said she, turning towards her other companion. "Monsieur de Custine has deserted his dear friend this evening, and left her to her unassisted defence."

"*Ma foi*," replied he, "I got ill rewarded for my advocacy. It was only last week when I helped her out through one of her blunders in grammar—she called me a 'ganache' for my pains."

"How very ungrateful. You that have been interpreter to her—her tutor for the entire winter—without whom, she could neither have obtained an ice, nor a glass of water."

"So is it; but you are all ungrateful—but I think I had better go and pay my respects to her—pray come along with me."

I followed the party into a small room, fitted up like a tent, where, amid some half-dozen persons assembled around, like an audience, sat a large, florid, and good-looking person—her costume of scarlet velvet turban and robe, adding to the flushed and high-coloured expression of her features. She was talking in a loud voice, and with an accent of such *patois* as I should much more naturally have expected in a remote faubourg, than in the gilded salons of the Tuileries. She had been relating some anecdotes of military life, which came within her own experience, and evidently amused her auditory as much by her manner, as the matter of her narrative.

"*Oui parbleu*," said she, drawing a long breath, "I was only the wife of a sergeant in the 'Gardes Francaises' in those days; but they were pleasant times, and the men one used to see were men indeed. They were not as much laced in gold, nor had not so much finery on their jackets; but they were bold, bronzed, manly fellows. You'd not see such a poor miserable little fellow as De Custine there, in a whole demi-brigade." When the laugh this speech caused, and in which her own merry voice joined, subsided, she continued—"Where will you find now any thing like the twenty-second of the line? Pioche was in that—poor Pioche—I tied up his jaw in Egypt when it was smashed by a bullet. I remember, too, when the regiment came back: your husband, the general, reviewed them in the court below, and poor Pioche was quite offended at not being noticed. 'We were good friends,' quoth he, 'at Mount Thabor, but he forgets all that now: that's what comes of a rise in the world. "Le Petit Caporal" was humble enough once I warrant him, but now he can't remember me.' Well, they were ordered

to march past in line, and there was Pioche, with his great dark eyes fixed on the general, and his big black beard flowing down to his waist; but no, he never noticed him no more than the tambour that beat the rappel. He could bear it no longer—his head was twisting with impatience and chagrin, and he sprung out of the lines, and seizing a brass gun—a '*piece de quatre*'—he mounted it like a fusee to his shoulder, and marched past, calling out '*Tu*'—he always *tu-toyed* him—'*tu me rappelle maintenant n'est ce pas petit ?*'"

No one enjoyed this little story more than Madame Bonaparte herself, who laughed for several minutes after it was over. Story after story did she pour forth in this way: most of them, however, had their merit in some personality or other, which, while recognised by the rest, had no attraction for me. There was in all she said the easy self-complacency of a kind-hearted but vulgar woman, vain of her husband, proud of his services, and perfectly indifferent to the habits and usages of a society, whose manners she gave herself no trouble to imitate, nor of whose ridicule was she in the least afraid.

I sauntered from the room alone, to wander through the other apartments, where objects of art and curiosities of every kind were profusely scattered. The marbles of Greece and Rome, the strange carvings of Egypt, the rich vases of Sevres were there, amid cabinet pictures of the rarest and most costly kind. Those delicious landscapes of the time of Louis XV., where every charm of nature and art was conveyed upon the canvas—the cool arbours of Versailles, with their terraced promenades and hissing fountains, the subjects which Vanloo loved to paint, and which that voluptuous court loved to contemplate—the long alleys of shady green, where gay groups were strolling in the mellow softness of an autumn sunset—those proud dames whose sweeping garments brushed the velvet turf, and at whose sides, uncovered, walked the chivalry of France, how did they live again in the bright pencil of Moucheron, and how did they carry one in fancy to the great days of the monarchy. Strange place for them too: the boudoir of her, whose husband had uprooted the ancient dynasty they commemorated—had erased from the list of kings that proudest of all the royal stocks in Europe. Was it the narrow-minded glory of the usurper that loved to look upon the greatness he had humbled, that brought them there, or was it rather the well-spring of that proud hope just rising in his heart that he was to be successor of those great kings, whose history formed the annals of Europe itself? As I wandered on, captivated in every sense by the charm of what to me was a scene in fairy land, I came suddenly before a picture of Josephine, surrounded by the ladies of her court. It was by Isabey, and had all the delicate beauty and transparent finish of that delightful painter. Beside it was another portrait by the same artist, and I started back in amazement at the resemblance. Never had colour better caught the rich tint of a southern complexion: the liquid softness of eye, the full and sparkling intelligence of ready wit and bright fancy all beamed in that lovely face. It needed not the golden letters in the frame which called it "La Rose de Provence." I sat down before it unconsciously, delighted

that I might gaze on such beauty unconstrained. The white hand leaned on a ballustrade, and seemed almost as if stretching from the very canvas. I could have knelt and kissed it. That was the very look she wore the hour I saw her first—it had never left my thoughts day or night—the half-rising blush, the slightly-averted head, the mingled look of impatience and kindness—all were there; and so entranced had I become, that I feared each instant lest the vision would depart, and leave me dark and desolate. The silence of the room was almost unbroken—a distant murmur of voices, the tones of a harp, were all I heard, and I sat, I know not how long, thus wrapped in ecstacy.

A tall screen of Chinese fabrique separated the part of the room I occupied from the rest, and left me free to contemplate alone those charms which each moment grew stronger upon me. An hour might perhaps have thus elapsed, when suddenly I heard the sound of voices approaching, but in a different direction from that of the *salons*. They were raised above the ordinary tone of speaking, and one in particular sounded in a strange accent of mingled passion and sarcasm, which I shall never forget. The door of the room was flung open before I could rise from my chair, and two persons entered, neither of whom could I see from my position behind the screen.

"I ask you, again and again, is the treaty of Amiens a treaty, or is it not?" said a harsh imperious tone, I at once recognised as that of the first consul, while his voice actually trembled with anger.

"My Lord Whitworth observed, if I mistake not," replied a measured and soft accent, where a certain courtier-like unction prevailed, "that the withdrawal of the British troops from Malta would follow, on our making a similar step as regards our forces in Switzerland and Piedmont."

"What right have they to make such a condition? They never complained of the occupation of Switzerland at the time of the treaty. I will not hear of such a stipulation. I tell you, Monsieur de Talleyrand, I'd rather see the English in the Faubourg St. Antoine, than in the Island of Malta. Why should we treat with England as a continental power? Of India, if she will—and as to Egypt, I told my Lord that sooner or later it must belong to France."

"A frankness he has reason to be thankful for," observed M. de Talleyrand, in a voice of sarcastic slyness.

"*Que voulez vous*," replied Bonaparte, in a raised tone, "they want a war, and they shall have it: what matter the cause—such treaties of peace as these had better be covered with black crape." Then dropping his voice to a half whisper, he added, "You must see him to-morrow. Explain how the attacks of the English press have irritated me—how deeply wounded I must feel at such a licence permitted under the very eyes of a friendly government—plots against my life encouraged—assassination countenanced. Repeat that Sebastiani's mission to Egypt is merely commercial. That although prepared for war, our wish, the wish of France is peace. That the armaments in Holland are destined for the colonies. Show yourself disposed to treat, but not to make advances. Reject the word *ultimatum*, if he

employ it. The phrase implies a parley between a superior and an inferior. This is no longer the France that remembers an English commissary at Dunkirk. If he do not use the word—then remark on its absence—say, these are not times for longer anxiety—that we must know, at last, to what we are to look. Tell him the Bourbons are not still on the throne here. Let him feel with whom he has to deal."

"And if he demand his passport," gravely observed Talleyrand, "you can be in the country for a day—at Plombieres—at St. Cloud."

A low subdued laugh followed these words, and they walked forward towards the *salons*, still conversing, but in a whispered tone.

A cold perspiration broke over my face and forehead, the drops fell heavily down my cheek, as I sat an unwilling listener of this eventful dialogue. That the fate of Europe was in the balance, I knew full well—and, ardently as I longed for war, the dreadful picture that rose before me damped much of my ardour—while a sense of my personal danger, if discovered where I was, made me tremble from head to foot. It was then, with a sinking spirit, that I retraced my steps towards the *salons*, not knowing if my absence had not been remarked and commented on. How little was I versed in such society—where each came and went as it pleased him; where the most brilliant beauty, the most spiritual conversationalist, left no gap by absence—and where such as I were no more noticed than the statues that held the wax lights.

The *salons* were now crowded—ministers of state, ambassadors, general officers, in their splendid uniforms, filled the apartments—in which the din of conversation and the sounds of laughter mingled. Yet, through the air of gaiety which reigned throughout—the tone of light and flippant smartness which prevailed—I thought I could mark here and there, among some of the ministers, an appearance of excitement, and a look of pre-occupation, little in unison with the easy intimacy which all seemed to possess. I looked on every side for the first consul himself, but he was no where to be seen. Monsieur Talleyrand, however, remained—I recognised him by his soft and measured accent, as he sat beside Madame Bonaparte, and was relating some story in a low voice, at which she seemed greatly amused. I could not help wondering at the lively and animated character of features, beneath which were concealed the dark secrets of state affairs, the tangled mysteries of political intrigue. To look on him, you would have said—there sits one, whose easy life flows on, unruffled by this world's chances. Not so the tall and swarthy man, whose dark moustache hangs far below his chin, and who leans on the chimney-piece yonder—the strong veins of his forehead are swollen and knitted, and his deep voice seems to tremble with strong emotion as he speaks.

"Pray, Monsieur, who is that officer yonder?" said I, to a gentleman beside me, and whose shoulder was half turned away.

"That," said he, raising his glass—"that is Savary, the minister of police. And, pardon, you are Mr. Burke—is't not so?"

I started as he pronounced my name, and looking fixedly at him,

recognised the antagonist with whom I was to measure swords the next morning in the Bois de Boulogne, I coloured at the awkwardness of my situation; but he, with more ease and self-possession, resumed—

"Monsieur, this is, to me at least, a very fortunate meeting. I have called twice, in the hope of seeing you this evening—and am overjoyed now to find you here. I behaved very ill to you this morning—I feel it now—I almost felt it at the time. If you will accept my apology for what has occurred, I make it most freely. My character is in no need of an affair, to make me known as a man of courage—yours, there can be no doubt of. May I hope you agree with me? I see you hesitate—perhaps I anticipate the reason—you do not know how far you can, or ought to receive such an amende." I nodded, and he continued—"Well, I am rather a practised person in these matters, and I can safely say, you may."

"Be it so then," said I, taking the hand he proffered, and shaking it warmly—"I am too young in the world to be my own guide, and I feel you would not deceive me."

A gratified look, and a renewed pressure of the hand, replied to my speech.

"One favour more—you musn't refuse me. Let us sup together—my *caleche* is below—people are already taking their leave here—and if you have no particular reason for remaining——"

"None—I know no one."

"*Allons*, then," said he, gaily taking my arm—and I soon found myself descending the marble stairs, beside the man I had expected to stand opposed to in deadly conflict a few hours later.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SUPPER AT "BEAUVILLIERS."

"WHERE to?" asked the coachman, as we entered the caleche.

"Beauvilliers," said the marquis, throwing himself back in his seat, and remaining for some minutes silent. At last, as if suddenly recollecting that we were strangers to each other, he said—"You know Beauvilliers of course."

"No," replied I with hesitation; "I really have not any acquaintance."

"*Parbleu!*" said he, laughing, "you ought at least to have his friendship. He is the most celebrated restaurateur of this or any other age; no one has carried the great art of the cuisine to a higher perfection, and his cellars are unequalled in Paris—but you shall pronounce for yourself."

"Unhappily my judgment is of little value. Do you forget that the diet roll of the Polytechnique is a bad school for gastronomy."

"But a glorious preparation for it," interrupted he. "How delightful must be the enjoyment to the unsophisticated palate of those first impressions which a '*carpe à la chambord*,' a pheasant '*truffeé*,' a dish of '*ortalons a la provençale*' inspire: but here we are. Our party is a small one—an old préfet of the south, an abbé, a secretary of the Russian embassy, and ourselves." This information he gave me as we mounted a narrow and winding stair, dimly lighted by a single lamp. On reaching the landing, however, a waiter stood in readiness to usher us into a small apartment decorated with all the luxury of gold and plate glass, so profusely employed in the interior of all *cafés*. The guests already mentioned were there, and evidently awaiting our arrival with no small impatience.

"As usual, Alfred," said the old man, whom I guessed to be the préfet—"as usual—an hour behind your appointment."

"Forgive him, monsieur," said the abbé, with a simper. "The fascinations of a court——"

The grimace the old man made at this last word threw the whole party into a roar of laughter, which only ceased by the marquis presenting me in all form to each of his friends.

"*A table, à table,* for heaven's sake," cried the préfet, ringing the bell, and bustling about the room with a fidgety impatience.

This was, however, unneeded; for in less than five minutes the supper made its appearance, and we took our places at the board.

The encomiums pronounced as each dish came and went, satisfied me that the feast was unexceptionable. As for myself, I eat away, only conscious that I had never been so regaled before, and wondering within me how far ingenuity had been exercised to produce the endless variety that appeared at table. The wine, too, circulated freely; and Champagne, Bourdeaux, and Chambertin followed each other in succession, as the different meats indicated the peculiar vintage. In the conversation I could take no part: it was entirely gastronomic; and no man ever existed more ignorant of the seasons that promised well for truffles, or the state of the atmosphere that threatened acidity to the vines.

"Well, Alfred," said the préfet, when the dessert made its appearance, and the time for concluding the gourmand dissertation seemed arrived—"Well, and what news from the Tuileries?"

"Nothing—absolutely nothing," said he, carelessly. "The same people; the same topics; the eternal game of tric-trac with old Madame d'Angerton; Denon tormenting some new victim with a mummy or a map of Egypt; Madame Lefevbre relating camp anecdotes——"

"Ah, she is delightful," interrupted the préfet.

"So thinks your chief at least, Askoff," said Beauvais, turning to the Russian. "He sat on the sofa beside her for a good hour and a half."

"Who sat near him on the other side?" slyly asked the other.

"On the other side. I forget—no, I remember it was Monsieur de Talleyrand and Madame Bonaparte; and now I think of it, he must have overheard what they said."

"Is it true then that Bonaparte insulted the English ambassador at the reception? Askoff heard it as he left the Rue St. Honore."

"Perfectly true. The scene was a most outrageous one; and Lord Whitworth retired, declaring to Talleyrand—at least so they say—that without an apology being made, he would abstain from any future visits at the Tuileries."

"But what is to come of it?—tell me that; what is to be the result?"

"*Pardieu!* I know not. A reconciliation to-morrow; an article in the *Moniteur;* a dinner at the court; and then another rupture, and another article."

"Or a war," said the Russian, looking cautiously about, to see if his opinion met any advocacy.

"What say you to that, *mon ami?*" said Beauvais, turning to me. "Glad enough I suppose you'll be to win your epaulettes as colonel."

"That, too, is on the cards," said the abbé, sipping his glass quietly: "one can credit any thing these times."

"Even the Catholic religion, abbé," said Beauvais, laughing.

"Or the Restoration," replied the abbé, with a half-malicious look at the préfet, which seemed greatly to amuse the Russian.

"Or the Restoration!" repeated the préfet solemnly after him—"or the restoration," and then filling his glass to the brim, he drained it to the bottom

"It is a hussar corps you are appointed to," said Beauvais, hastily turning towards me, as if anxious to engage my attention.

"Yes; the *huitième,*" said I: "do you know them?"

"No; I have few acquaintances in the army."

"His father, sir," said the préfet, with a voice of considerable emphasis, "was an old *garde du corps* in those times when the sword was only worn by gentlemen."

"So much the worse for the army," whispered the abbé in an under tone, that was sufficiently audible to the rest to cause an outbreak of laughter.

"And when," continued the préfet, undisturbed by the interruption, "birth had its privileges."

"Among the rest, that of being the first beheaded," murmured the inexorable abbé.

"Were truffles dear before the Revolution, préfet?" said Beauvais, with a half-impertinent air of simplicity.

"No, sir; nothing was dear save the king's favour."

"Which could also be had for paying for," quoth the abbé.

"The *Moniteur* of this evening, gentlemen," said the waiter, entering with the paper, whose publication had been delayed some two hours beyond the usual period.

"Ah, let us see what have we here," said Beauvais, opening the journal and reading aloud—

"'General Espinasse is appointed to the command of the fourth corps, stationed at Lille, and Major-general Lannes to the fortress of Montreil, vacant by——' No matter—here it is. 'Does the English

government suppose that France is one of her Indian possessions, without the means to declare her wrongs, or the power to avenge them?—can they believe that rights are not reciprocal, and that the observance of one contracting party, involves nothing on the part of the other?'"

"There, there, Beauvais; don't worry us with that tiresome nonsense."

"'Or,'" continued the marquis, still reading aloud, "'do they presume to say, that we shall issue no commercial instructions to our agents abroad, lest English susceptibility should be wounded by any prospect of increased advantages to our trade.'"

"Our trade!" echoed the préfet, with a most contemptuous intonation on the word.

"Ah! for those good old times, when there was none!" said the abbé, with such a semblance of honest sincerity as drew an approving smile from the old man.

"Hear this, préfet," said Beauvais: "'From the times of Colbert to the present'—what think you? the allusion, right royal, is it not?—'From the times of Colbert our negociations have been always conducted in this manner.'"

"Sir, I beseech you read no more of that intolerable nonsense."

"And here," continued the marquis, "follows a special invocation of the benediction of heaven on the just efforts which France is called on to make, to repress the insolent aggression of England—abbé, this concerns you."

"Of course," said he, meekly, "I am quite prepared to pray for the party in power: if heaven but leaves them there, I must conclude they deserve it."

A doubtful look, as if he but half understood him, was the only reply the old préfet made to this speech; at which the laughter of the others could no longer be repressed, and burst forth most heartily.

"But let us read on. Whose style is this think you?—'France possessed within her dominion every nation from the North-sea to the Adriatic, and how did she employ her power?—in restoring to Batavia self-government, in giving liberty to Switzerland, and in ceding Venice to Austria, while the troops at the very gates of Vienna are halted and repass the Rhine once more. Are these the evidences of ambition—are these the signs of that overweening lust of territory with which England dares to reproach us? And if such passions prevailed, what easier than to have indulged them? Was not Italy our own? Were not Batavia, Switzerland, Portugal, all ours? But no, peace was the desire of the nation—peace at any cost. The colony of St. Domingo, that immense territory, was not conceived a sacrifice too great to secure such a blessing.'"

"*Pardieu!* Beauvais, I can bear it no longer."

"You must let me give you the reverse of the medal. Hear now what England has done."

"He writes well, at least for the taste of newspaper readers," said the abbé, musingly; "but still he only understands the pen as he does the sword; it must be a weapon of attack."

"Who is the writer, then?" said I, in a half whisper.

"Who!—can you doubt it?—Bonaparte himself. What other man in France would venture to pronounce so authoritatively on the prospects and intentions of the nation."

"Or who," said the abbé, in his dry manner, "could speak with such accuracy of the 'Illustrious and Magnanimous Chief' that rules her destinies."

"It is growing late," said the préfet, with the air of one who took no pleasure in the conversation, "and I start for Rouen to-morrow morning."

"Come, come, préfet, one bumper before we part," said Beauvais; "something has put you out of temper this evening; yet I think I know a toast can restore you to good humour again."

The old man lifted his hand with a gesture of caution, while he suddenly directed a look towards me.

"No, no; don't be afraid," said Beauvais, laughing; "I think you'll acquit me of any rashness: fill up, then, and here let us drink one in the old palace of the Tuileries who, at this moment, can bring us back in memory to the most glorious days of our country."

"*Pardieu!* that must be the first consul, I suppose," whispered the abbé to the préfet, who dashed his glass with such violence on the table as to smash it in a hundred pieces.

"See what comes of impatience," cried Beauvais, laughing; "and now you have not wherewithal to pledge my fair cousin the 'Rose of Provence.'"

"The Rose of Provence," said each in turn, while, excited by the wine, of which I had drank freely, and carried away by the enthusiasm of the moment, I re-echoed the words in such a tone as drew every eye upon me.

"Ah! you know my cousin then," said Beauvais, looking at me with a strange mixture of curiosity and astonishment.

"No," said I, "I have seen her ——. I saw her this evening at the palace."

"Well, I must present you," said he, smiling good-naturedly. Before I could mutter my acknowledgment, the party had risen, and were taking leave of each other for the night.

"I shall see you soon again, Burke," said Beauvais, as he pressed my hand warmly; "and now, adieu." With that we parted; and I took my way back towards the Polytechnique, my mind full of the strange incidents of this, the most eventful night in my quiet and monotonous existence.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE "TWO VISITS."

Amid all the stirring duties of the next day—amid all the excitement of a new position, my mind recurred continually to the events of the previous twenty-four hours. Now dwelling on the *soirée* at the palace—the unaccustomed splendour, the rank, the beauty I had witnessed; now on that eventful moment I spent behind the screen; then on my strange rencontre with my antagonist, and that still stranger supper that followed it.

It was not indeed without certain misgivings which I could neither account for nor dismiss from my mind, that I reflected on the character and conversation of my new associates.

The tone of levity in which they dared to speak of him whose name was to me something bordering on idolatry—the liberty with which they ventured to canvass his measures and his opinions, even to ridiculing them, were so many puzzles to my mind, and I half reproached myself for having tamely listened to language which now, as I thought over it, seemed to demand my notice. Totally ignorant of all political intrigue—unconscious that any party did or could exist in France, save that of the first consul himself, I could find no solution to the enigma, and at last began to think that I had been exaggerating to myself the words I had heard, and permitting my ignorance to weigh with me, where, with more knowledge, I should have seen nothing reprehensible; and if the spirit in which they discussed the acts of Bonaparte differed from what I had been accustomed to, might it not rather proceed from my own want of acquaintance with the usages of society, than any deficiency in attachment on their sides. The préfet was, of course, as an officer of the government, no mean judge of what became him—the abbé, too, as a man of education and in holy orders, was equally unlikely to express unbecoming opinions; the Russian scarcely spoke at all; and as for Beauvais, his careless and headlong impetuosity made me feel easy on his score; and so I reasoned myself into the conviction that it was only the ordinary bearing and every-day habit of society, to speak thus openly of one, who, in the narrower limits of our little world, was deemed something to worship.

Shall I own what then I could scarcely have confessed to myself, that the few words Beauvais spoke at parting—the avowed cousinship with her they called "La Rose de Provence"—did much to induce this conviction on my mind; while his promise to present me, was a pledge I could not possibly believe consistent, with any but right loyal thoughts and honest doctrines. Still I would have given any thing for one friend to advise with—one faithful counsellor to aid me: but again was I alone

in the world, and, save the short and not over-flattering reception of my colonel, I had neither seen nor spoken to one of my new corps.

That evening I joined my regiment and took up my quarters in the barracks, where already the rumour of important political events had reached the officers; and they stood in groups discussing the chances of a war, or listening to the *Moniteur*, which was read out by one of the party. What a strange thrill it sent through me to think that I was privy to the deepest secret of that important step on which the peace of Europe was resting—that I had heard the very words as they fell from the lips of him on whom the destiny of millions then depended. With what a different interpretation to me came those passages in the government journal which breathed of peace, and spoke of painful sacrifices to avoid a war, for which already his very soul was thirsting; and how, to my young heart, did that passion for glory exalt him who could throw all into the scale. The proud position he occupied—the mighty chief of a mighty nation—the adulation in which he daily lived—the gorgeous splendour of a court no country in Europe equalled: all these, and more—his future destiny—did he set upon the cast, for the great game his manly spirit gloried in.

In such thoughts as these I lived as in a world of my own; companionship I had none. My brother officers, with few exceptions, had risen from the ranks, and were of that class which felt no pleasure save in the coarse amusements of the barrack-room, or the vulgar jests of the service. The better class lived studiously apart from these, and made no approaches to intimacy with any newly-joined officer with whose family and connections they were unacquainted; and I, from my change of country, stood thus alone, unacknowledged and unknown. At first this isolation pained and grieved me, but gradually it became less irksome; and when at length they who had at first avoided and shunned my intimacy, showed themselves disposed to know me, my pride, which before would have been gratified by such an acknowledgment, was now wounded, and I coolly declined their advances.

Some weeks passed in this manner, during which I never saw or heard of Beauvais, and at length began to feel somewhat offended at the suddenness with which he seemed to drop an intimacy begun at his own desire; when one evening, as I had returned to my barrack-room after parade, I heard a knock at my door. I rose and opened it, when, to my surprise, I beheld Beauvais before me; he was much thinner than when I last saw him, and his dress and appearance all betokened far less of care and attention.

"Are these your quarters?" said he, entering and throwing a cautious look about. "Are you alone here?"

"Yes," said I, "perfectly."

"You expect no one?"

"Not any," said I again, still more surprised at the agitation of his manner, and the evident degree of anxiety he laboured under.

"Thank heaven," said he, drawing a deep sigh as he threw himself on my little camp-bed, and covered his face with his hands.

Seeing that something weighed heavily on him, I half feared to inter-

fere with the current of his thoughts, and merely drew my chair and sat down beside him.

"I say, Burke, *mon cher*, have you any wine? Let me have a glass or two, for, save some galette, and that not the best either, I have tasted nothing these last twenty-four hours." I soon set before him the contents of my humble larder, and in a few moments he rallied a good deal, and, looking up with a smile, said—"I think you have been cultivating *your* education as gourmand since I saw you. That pasty is worthy our friend in the palais royale. Well, and how have you been since we met?"

"Let me rather ask *you*," said I. "You are not looking so well as the last time I saw you. Have you been ill?"

"Ill! no, not ill. Yet I can't say so; for I have suffered a good deal too. No, my friend: I have had much to harass and distress me. I have been travelling, too, long distances and weary ones—met some disappointments, and altogether the world has not gone so well with me as I think it ought; and now of you. What of yourself?"

"Alas!" said I, "if you have met much to annoy, I have only lived a dull life of daily monotony. If it has had little to distress, there is fully as little to cheer; and I half suspect the fine illusions I used to picture to myself of a soldier's career, had very little connexion with reality."

As Beauvais seemed to listen with more attention than such a theme would naturally call for, I gradually was drawn into a picture of my barrack life, in which I dwelt at length on my own solitary position, and the want of that companionship which formed the chief charm of my school-boy life. To all this he paid a marked attention—now questioning me on some unexplained point—now agreeing with me in what I said by a word, or a gesture.

"And do you know, Burke," said he, interrupting me in my description of those whose early coldness of manner had chilled my first advances—"and do you know," said he, impetuously, "who these aristocrats are? The sons of honest *bourgeois* of Paris. Their fathers are worthy men of the Rue Vivienne or the Palais—excellent people, I've no doubt; but very far better judges of point lace and *pâte de perigord* than disputed precedence and armorial quarterings. Far better the others, the humble soldiers of fortune, whose highest pride is their own daring, their own undaunted heroism. Well, well," added he, after a pause, "I must get you away from this—I can manage it in a day or two. You shall be sent down to Versailles with a detachment."

I could not help starting with surprise at these words, and through all the pleasure they gave me, my astonishment was still predominant.

"I see you are amazed at what I say, but it's not so wonderful as you think. My cousin has only to hint to Madame Bonaparte, who is at present there, and the thing is done."

I blushed deeply as I thought of the agency through which my wishes were to meet accomplishment, and turned away to hide my embarrassment.

"By-the-by, I have not presented you to her yet. I've had no opportunity; but now I shall do so at once."

"Pray, tell me your cousin's name," said I, anxious to say any thing to conceal my confusion. "I've only heard her called 'la Rose de Provence.'"

"Yes, that was a silly fancy of Madame la Consulesse, because Marie is a *Provençal.* But her name is De Rochfort, at least her mother's name; for, by another caprice, she was forbidden by Bonaparte to bear her father's name. But this is rather a sore topic with me. Let us change it. How did you like my friends the other evening? The abbé is agreeable, is he not?"

"Yes," said I, hesitating somewhat; "but I am so unaccustomed to hear General Bonaparte discussed so freely——"

"That absurd Polytechnique!" interrupted Beauvais. "How many a fine fellow has it spoiled with its ridiculous notions and foolish prejudices!"

"Come, come," said I, "you must not call prejudices the attachment which I, and all who wear an epaulette, feel in our glorious chief. There, there—don't laugh, or you'll provoke me; for if I, an alien, feel this, how should you, who are a Frenchman born, sympathize with such a proud career?"

"If you talk of sympathy, Burke, let me ask you—have you ever heard speak of a certain old family of these realms, who have been driven forth and expatriated to seek a home among strangers, themselves the descendants of the fairest chivalry of our land—the proud scions of Saint Louis?—and has your sympathy never strayed across sea, to mingle with *their* sorrows." His voice trembled as he spoke, and a large tear filled and tracked its way along his cheek, as the last word vibrated on his tongue; and then, as if suddenly remembering how far he had been carried away by momentary impulse, he added, in an altered voice—"But what have we to do with these things? Our road is yet to be travelled by either of us. Yours a fair path enough, if it only fulfil its early promise. The fortunate fellow that can win his grade while yet a school-boy——"

"How came you to know——?"

"Oh! I know more than that, Burke; and believe me, if my foolish conduct, the first day we met, had led to any thing disastrous, I should have passed a life of sorrow for it ever after; but we shall have time enough to talk over all these matters in the green alleys of Versailles, where I hope to see you before a week be over. Great events may happen ere long, too. Burke, you don't know it, but I can tell you, a war with England is at this moment on the eve of declaration."

"Perhaps," said I, somewhat piqued by the tone of superiority in which he had spoken for some minutes, and anxious to assume for myself a position which, I forgot, conferred no credit by the manner of its attainment, "I know more of *that* than you are aware of."

"Oh," replied he carelessly, "the gossip of a mess is but little to be relied on. The '*sabreurs*' will always tell you that the order to march is given."

"I don't mean that," said I, haughtily. "My information has a higher source—the highest of all—General Bonaparte himself."

"How!—what!—Bonaparte himself!"

"Listen to me," said I; and, hurried on by a foolish vanity, and a strange desire, I cannot explain, to make a confidant in what I felt to be a secret too weighty for my own bosom, I told him all that I had overheard when seated behind the screen in the *salon* at the Tuileries.

"You heard this—you yourself?" cried he, as his eyes flashed, and he grasped my arm with an eager grip.

"Yes, with my own ears I heard it," said I, half trembling at the disclosure I made, and ready to give all I possessed to recall my words.

"My friend, my dear friend," said he impetuously, "you must hesitate no longer—be one of us."

I started at the words, and, growing pale with agitation as the very thought of the importance of what I had related flashed across me, I stammered out—"Take care what you propose to me, Beauvais. I do not, I cannot fathom your meaning now; but if I thought that any thing like treachery to the first consul—that any thing traitorous to the great cause of liberty for which he has fought and conquered was meditated, I'd go forthwith and tell him, word for word, all I have spoken now, even though the confession would, as it might, humble me for ever, and destroy all my future hope of advancement."

"And be well laughed at for your pains, foolish boy," said he, throwing himself back in his chair, and bursting out into a fit of laughter. "No, no, Burke, you must not do any thing half so ridiculous, or my pretty cousin could never look at you without a smile ever after; and aprôpos of that—when shall I present you? That splendid jacket and all that finery of Dolman there will make sad work of her poor heart."

I blushed deeply at the silly impetuosity I had betrayed myself into, and muttered some equally silly apology for it; still, young as I was, I could perceive that my words made no common impression on him, and would have given my best blood to recall them.

"Do you know, Beauvais," said I, affecting as much of coolness as I could—"do you know, I half regret having told you this. The manner in which I heard this conversation—though, as you will see, quite involuntary on my part—should have prevented my ever having repeated it; and now the only reparation I can make is, to wait on my colonel, explain the whole circumstance, and ask his advice."

"In plain words, to make public what at present is only confided to a friend. Well, you think the phrase too strong for one you have seen but twice—the first time not exactly on terms such as warrant the phrase. But come, if you can't trust me, I'll see if I can't trust you."

He drew at these words a roll of paper from his pocket, and was proceeding to open it on the table, when a violent knocking was heard at my door.

"What's that—who can it be?" said he, starting up, and growing pale as death.

The look of terror in his face appalled me, and I stood, not able to reply, or even move towards the door, when the knocking was repeated much louder, and I heard my name called out; pointing to a closet which led from the room, and without speaking a word, I walked forward and unlocked the door; a tall man, wrapped in a blue cloak, and wearing a cocked hat covered with oil skin, stood before me, accompanied by a sergeant of my troop.

"This is the sous lieutenant, sir," said the sergeant, touching his cap.

"That will do," replied the other; "you may leave us now." Then turning to me, he added—"May I have the favour of a few minutes' conversation with you, Mr. Burke? I am Monsieur Gisquet, *chef de police* of the department."

A trembling ran through me at the words, and I stammered out something scarce audible in reply. Monsieur Gisquet followed me as I led the way into my room, which already had been deserted by Beauvais, and casting a quick glance around, he leisurely took off his hat and cloak and drew a chair towards the table.

"Are we alone, sir?" said he, in a measured tone of voice, while his eye fell with a peculiar meaning on a chair which stood opposite to mine, on the opposite side of the stove.

"I had a friend with me when you knocked," I muttered in a broken and uncertain accent; "but perhaps——" before I could finish my sentence the door of the cabinet slowly opened, and Beauvais appeared, but so metamorphosed, I could scarcely recognise him; for short as the interval was, he had put on my old uniform of the Polytechnique, which, from our similarity in height, fitted him perfectly.

"All safe, Tom," said he, stealing out, with an easy smile on his countenance. "*Par St. Denis!* I thought it was old Legrange himself come to look for me. Ah, monsieur, how d'ye do? You have given me a rare fright to-night. I came to spend the day with my friend here, and as ill luck would have it, have outstaid my time. The *ecole* closes at nine, so that I'm in for a week's arrest at least."

"A cool confession this, sir, to a minister of police," said Gisquet, sternly, while his dark eyes surveyed the speaker from head to foot.

"Not when that minister is called Monsieur Gisquet," said he, readily, and bowing courteously as he spoke.

"You know me then?" said the other, still peering at him with a sharp look.

"Only from your likeness to a little boy in my company," said he; —"Henri Gisquet; a fine little fellow he is, and one of the cleverest in the school."

"You are right, sir; he is my son," said the minister, as a pleased smile passed over his swarthy features. "Come, I think I must get you safe through your dilemma. Take this; the officer of the night will be satisfied with the explanation, and Monsieur Legrange will not hear of it."

So saying, he seized a pen, and writing a few lines rapidly on a piece of paper, he folded it note fashion and handed it to Beauvais.

"A handsome ring, sir," said he, suddenly, and holding the fingers within his own; "a very costly one too."

"Yes, sir," said Beauvais, blushing scarlet. "A cousin of mine——"

"Ha, ha! an *amourette* too. Well, well, young gentleman, no need of further confessions. Lose no more time here—*bon soir*."

"Adieu, Burke," said Beauvais, shaking my hand with a peculiar pressure.

"Adieu, Monsieur Gisquet. This order will pass me through the barrack, won't it?"

"Yes; to be sure. You need fear no interference with my people either, go where you will this evening."

"Thanks, sir, once more," said he, and departed.

"Now for our business, Mr. Burke," said the minister, opening his pacquet of papers before him, and commencing to con over its contents. "I shall ask you a few questions, to which you will please to reply with all the accuracy you can command, remembering that you are liable to be called on to verify any statement hereafter on oath. With whom did you speak on the evening of the second of May, at the soiree of Madame Bonaparte?"

"I scarcely remember if I spoke to any one save madame herself; a strange gentleman, whose name I know not, presented me; one or two others also unknown to me may have spoken a passing word or so; and when coming away I met Monsieur de Beauvais."

"Monsieur de Beauvais! who is he?"

"*Ma foi*, I can't tell you. I saw him the day before for the first time: we renewed our acquaintance, and we supped together."

"At Beauvilliers'," said he, interrupting?

"*Pardieu!* monsieur," said I, somewhat stung at the 'espionage' on my movements, "you seem to know every thing so well already, it is quite needless to interrogate me any further."

"Perhaps not," replied he coolly. "I wish to have the names of the party you supped with."

"Well, there was one who was called the préfet, a large, full, elderly man."

"Yes, yes, I know him," interrupted Gisquet again; "and the others?"

"There was an abbé, and a secretary of the Russian mission."

"No other?" said he, in a tone of disappointment.

"No one, save Beauvais and myself—we were but five in all."

"Did no one come in during the evening?"

"No, not any."

"Nor did any leave the party?"

"No; we separated at the same moment."

"Who accompanied you to the barracks?"

"No one. I returned alone."

"And this Monsieur Beauvais; you can't tell any thing of him? What age is he? what height?"

"About my own," said I, blushing deeply at the thought of the events of a few moments back. "He may be somewhat older; but he looks not much more than twenty-one or two."

"Have you mentioned any of these circumstances to any of your brother officers or to your colonel?"

"No, sir, never."

"Very right, sir. These are times in which discretion is of no common importance. I have only to recommend similar circumspection in future. It is probable that some of these gentlemen may visit you and write to you—they may invite you to sup or to dine; if so, sir, accept the invitation; be cautious, however, not to speak of this interview to any one. Remember, sir, I am the messenger of one who never forgave a breach of trust, but who also never fails to reward loyalty and attachment. If you be but prudent, Mr. Burke, your fortune is certain."

With these words, Monsieur Gisquet threw his cloak over his shoulder, and raising his hat, he bowed formally to me, and withdrew, leaving me to meditations which, I need not say, were none of the happiest.

If my fears were excited by the thought of the acquaintances I had so rashly formed; so also was my pride insulted by the system of watching to which my movements had been subjected; and deeper still, by the insulting nature of the proposal the minister of police had not scrupled to make to me, and which only, on reflecting over, did I perceive how base and dishonourable it was.

"What!" asked I of myself, "is it a spy—is it a false underhand betrayer of the men into whose society I have been admitted on terms of friendly intercourse he would make of me? What saw he in me or in my actions, to dare so far? Was not the very cloth I wear enough to guard me against such an insult?" Then came the maddening reflection—"Why had I not thought of this sooner? Why had I not rejected his proposal with scorn, and told him, that I was not of the stuff he looked for?"

But, what was it that he wished to learn? and who were these men, and what were their designs? These were questions that flashed across me, and I trembled to think how deeply implicated I might become at any moment, in plans of which I knew nothing—merely from the imprudence with which I had made their acquaintance—the escape of Beauvais, if discovered, would also inevitably involve me, and thus did I seem hurried along by a train of incidents, without will or concurrence, each step but increasing the darkness around me.

That Gisquet knew most of the party was clear, Beauvais alone seemed personally unknown to him. What then did he want of me? Alas! it was a tangled web I could make nothing of—and all I could resolve on, was to avoid in future all renewal of intimacy with Beauvais, to observe the greatest circumspection with regard to all new acquaintance—and since the police thought it worth their while to set spies upon my track—to limit my excursions, for some time at least, to the routine of my duty, and the bounds of the barrack-yard. These were wise resolutions—and if somewhat late in coming, yet not without

their comfort; above all—because, in my heart I felt no misgivings of affection, no lack of loyalty to him who was still my idol.

Well, well, thought I, something may come of this—perhaps a war—if so, happy shall I be to leave Paris and all its intrigues behind me, and seek distinction in a more congenial sphere, and under other banners than a police minister would afford me.

With thoughts like these I fell asleep, to dream over all the events of the preceding day, and wake the next morning with an aching head, and confused brain—my only clear impression being, that some danger hung over me, but from what quarter, and how, or in what way it was to be met or averted, I could not guess.

The whole day I felt a feverish dread lest Beauvais should appear. Something whispered me that my difficulties were to come of my acquaintance with him, and I studiously passed my time among my brother officers, knowing that, so long as I remained among them, he was not likely to visit me; and when evening came, I gladly accepted an invitation to a barrack-room supper, which, but the night before, I should have declined without hesitation.

This compliance on my part seemed well taken by my companions, and in their frank and cordial reception of me, I felt a degree of reproach to myself, for my having hitherto lived estranged from them. We had just taken our place at table, when the door was flung wide open, and a young captain of the regiment rushed in, waving a paper over his head, as he called out—

"Good news, *mes braves*, glorious news for you! Listen to this—the English ambassador has demanded his passports, and left Paris; expresses are sent off to the fourth corps, to move towards the coast; twelve regiments have received orders to march; so that before my lord leaves Calais, he may witness a review of the army."

"Is this true?"

"It is all certain."

"Read it, here's the *Moniteur*, with the official announcement."

In an instant a dozen heads were bent over the paper, each eager to scan the paragraph so long and ardently desired.

"Come, Burke, I hope you have not forgotten your English," said the major; "we shall want you soon to interpret for us in London, if, *pardieu*, we can ever find our way through the fogs of that ill-starred island."

I hung my head without speaking—the miserable isolation of him who has no country, is a sad and sickening sense of want, no momentary enthusiasm, no impulse of high daring can make up for. Happily for me, all were too deeply interested in the important news to remark me, or pay any attention to my feelings.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE MARCH TO VERSAILLES.

They who remember the excited state of England on the rupture of the peace of Amiens—the spirit of military ardour that animated every class and condition of life—the national hatred, carried to the highest pitch by the instigations and attack of a violent press, can yet form but an imperfect notion of the mad enthusiasm that prevailed in France on the same occasion.

The very fact that there was no determinate and precise cause of quarrel, added to the exasperation on both sides. It was less like the warfare of two great nations, than the personal animosity of two high-spirited and passionate individuals, who, having interchanged words of insult, resolve on the sword as the only arbiter between them.

All that the long rivalry of centuries, national dislike, jealousy in every form, and ridicule in a thousand shapes, could suggest, were added to the already existing hate, and gave to the coming contest a character of the blackest venom. In England, the tyrannic rule of Bonaparte gave deep offence to all true lovers of liberty, and gave rise to fears of what the condition of their own country would become, should he continue to increase his power by conquest. In France, the rapid rise to honour and wealth, the career of arms so singularly favoured, made partizans of war in every quarter of the kingdom. The peaceful arts were but mean pursuits compared with that royal road to rank and riches, the field of battle; and their self-interest lent its share in forming the spirit of hostility, which wanted no element of hatred to make it perfect.

Paris, where so lately nothing was heard save the roll of splendid equipages—the din of that gay world whose business is amusement—where amid gilded *salons* the voluptuous habits of the Consulate, mixed with the less courtly but scarce less costly display of military splendour, became now like a vast camp. Regiments poured in daily to resume their march the next morning; the dull rumble of ammunition-waggons and caissons—the warlike clank of mounted cavalry awoke the citizen at day-break; the picquets of hussar corps and the dusty and travel-stained infantry soldiers filled the streets at nightfall: yet through all, the mad gaiety of this excited nation prevailed. The cafés were crowded with eager and delighted faces; the tables spread in the open air, were occupied by groups, whose merry voices and ready laughter attested that war was the pastime of the people, and the very note of preparation—a toscin of joy and festivity. The walls were placarded with inflammatory addresses to the patriotism and spirit of France.

The papers teemed with artful and cleverly-written explanations of the rupture with England, in which every complaint against that country was magnified, and every argument put forward to prove the peaceful desires of that nation, whose present enthusiasm for war was an unhappy commentary on the assertion. The good faith of France was extolled—the moderation of the first consul dwelt upon; and the treachery of that "perfidious Albion that respected not the faith of treaties," was displayed in such irrefragible clearness, that the humblest citizen thought the cause his own, and felt the coming contest the ordeal of his own honour.

All the souvenirs of the former wars were invoked to give spirit to the approaching struggle; and they were sufficiently numerous to let no week pass over without at least one eventful victory to commemorate.

Now it was Kellerman's cuirassiers, whose laurel-wreathed helmets reminded the passing stranger, that on that day eight years they tore through the dense ranks of the Austrians, and sabred the gunners at the very guns. Now it was the Polish regiments—the steel-clad lancers —who paraded before the Tuileries, in memory of the proud day they marched through Montebello with that awful sentence on their banners, "Venice exists no longer." Here were corps of infantry, intermingled with dragoons, pledging each other as they passed along; while the names of Castiglione, Bassano, and Roveredo rang through the motley crowd—the very children, "*les enfants de troupe*," seemed filled with the warlike enthusiasm of their fathers; and each battalion, as it moved past, stepped to the encouraging shouts of thousands, who gazed with envious admiration on the heroes of their country.

Never did the pent-up feelings of a nation find vent in such a universal torrent of warlike fervour as now filled the land. The clank of the sabre was the music that charmed the popular ear; and the "coquette vivandiere," as she tripped along the gravel avenues of the Tuileries gardens, was as much an object of admiration as the most splendidly-attired beauty of the "Faubourg St. Germain." The whole tone of society assumed the feature of the political emergency. The theatres only represented such pieces as bore upon the ancient renown of the nation in arms—its victories and conquests. The artists painted no other subjects; and the literature of the period appealed to few other sympathies than are found in the rude manners of the guard-room, or around the watch-fires of the bivouac. Pigualt Lebrun was the popular author of the day; and his works are even now no mean indication of the current tastes and opinions of the period.

The predictions too hastily made by the English journals that the influence of Bonaparte in France could not survive the rupture of that peace which had excited so much enthusiasm, were met by a burst of national unanimity, that soon dispelled the delusive hope. Never was there a greater error than to suppose that any prospect of commercial prosperity, any vista of wealth and riches, could compensate to Frenchmen for the intoxication of that glory on which they lived as in an orgie. Too many banners floated from the deep aisles of the

"Invalides;" too many cannon, the spoils of the Italian and German wars, bristled on the rampart, not to recall the memory of those *fête* days when a bulletin threw the entire city into a frenzy of joy. The Louvre and the Luxembourg, too, were filled with the treasures of conquered states, and these are not the guarantees of a long peace.

Such in brief was the state of Paris, when the declaration of war by Great Britain once more called the nation to arms. Every regiment was at once ordered to make up its full complement to the war standard, and the furnaces were employed in forging shot and casting cannon throughout the length and breadth of France. The cavalry corps were stationed about St. Omer and Compeigne, where a rich corn country supplied forage in abundance. Among the rest the order came for the *huitième* to march, one squadron only was to remain behind, chosen to execute *le service des depêches* from St. Cloud and Versailles to Paris, and to this I belonged.

From the evening of Monsieur Gisquet's visit I had never seen or heard of Beauvais, and at last the hope grew in me that we were to meet no more, when suddenly the thought flashed across my mind; this is what he spoke of! he promised I should be sent to Versailles! Can it be chance, or is this his doing? These were difficult questions to solve, and gave me far more embarrassment than pleasure. My fears that my acquaintance with him was in the end to involve me in some calamity, was a kind of superstition which I could not combat, and I resolved at once to see my colonel, with whom happily I was now on the best of terms, and endeavour to exchange with some other officer, any, being willing to accept a post so much more agreeable than a mere country quarter. I found the old man busied in the preparations for departure, he was marking out the days of march to the adjutant as I entered.

"Well, Burke," said he, "you are the fortunate fellow this time; your troop remains behind."

"It is on that account, sir, I am come. You'll think my request a strange one, but if it be not against rule, would you permit me to exchange my destination with another officer."

"What—eh! the boy's mad. Why it's to Versailles you are going."

"I know, sir, but somehow I'd rather remain with the regiment."

"This is very strange, I don't understand it," said he leisurely. "Come here." With that he drew me into the recess of a window where we could talk unheard by others. "Burke," continued he, "I'm not the man to question my young fellows about secrets which they'd rather keep for themselves; but there is something here more than common. Do you know that in the order, it was your squadron was specially marked out, all the officers' names were mentioned, and yours particularly, for Versailles?"

A deadly paleness and a cold sick chill spread over my face; I tried to say some commonplace, but I could not utter more than the words, "I feared it." Happily for me he did not hear them, but taking my hand kindly said—

"I see it all, some youthful folly or other would make you better

pleased to leave Paris just now. Never mind, stormy times are coming, you'll have enough on your hands presently, and let me advise you to make the most of your time at Versailles, for if I'm not mistaken, you'll see much more of camps than courts for some time to come."

The rest of that day left me but little time for reflection; but in such short intervals as I could snatch from duty, one thought ever rose to my mind. Can this be Beauvais' doing? Has he had any share in my present destination, and with what object? Well, said I to myself at last, these are but foolish fears after all, and may be causeless ones. If I but follow the straight path of my duty, what need I care if the whole world intrigued and plotted around me. And after all, was it not most likely that we should never see each other again?

The day was just breaking when we left Paris; the bright beams of a May morning's sun were flickering and playing in the rippling river that ran cold and grey beneath—the tall towers of the Tuileries threw their long shadows across the Place Carousel, where a dragoon regiment was encamped: they were already astir, and some of the men were standing around the fountains with their horses, and others were looking after the saddles and accoutrements in preparation for the march; a-half expiring fire here and there marked where some little party had been sitting together, while the jars and flasks about bespoke a merry evening. A trumpeter sat, statue-like, on his white horse, his trumpet resting on his knee, surveying the whole scene, and as if deferring to the last the wakeful summons that should rouse some of his yet sleeping comrades. I could see thus much as we passed. Our road led along the quay towards the Place Louis XV. where an infantry battalion with four guns were picquetted. The men were breakfasting and preparing for the route. They were part of the *grande armée* under orders for Boulogne.

We soon traversed the Champs Elysées, and entered the open country; for some miles it was merely a succession of large corn fields, and here and there a small vineyard that met the eye on either side; but as we proceeded farther we were girt in by rich orchards in full blossom, the whole air loaded with the perfume. Neat cottages peeped from the woody enclosures, the trelliced walls covered with honeysuckles and wild roses; the surface, too, was undulating and waved in every imaginable direction, offering every variety of hill and valley, precipice and plain, in even the smallest space. As yet no peasant was stirring, no smoke curled from a single chimney, and all, save the song of the lark, was silent. It was a peaceful scene, and a strong contrast to that we left behind us; and whatever ambitious yearnings filled my heart, as I looked upon the armed ranks of the mailed cuirassiers, I felt a deeper sense of happiness as I strayed along those green alleys, through which the sun came slanting sparingly, and where the leaves only stirred as their winged tenants moved among them.

We travelled for some hours through the dark paths of the Bois de Boulogne, and again emerged in a country wild and verdant as before. And thus passed our day, till the setting sun rested on

the tall roof of the great palace, and lit up every window in golden splendour as we entered the town of Versailles.

I could scarce avoid halting as I rode up the wide terrace of the palace ;—never had I felt before the overcoming sense of grandeur which architecture can bestow ; the great façade in its chaste and simple beauty, stretched away to a distance, where dark lime trees closed the back-ground, their tall summits only peeping above the lofty terrace in which the chateau stands. On that terrace, too, were walking a crowd of persons of the court—the full dress costume showing that they had but left the *salons* to enjoy the cool and refreshing air of the evening. I saw some turn and look after our travel-stained and dusty party, and confess I felt a half sense of shame at our way-worn appearance. I had not long to suffer such mortification, for ere we marched more than a few minutes we were joined by a *Marechal de Logis*, who accompanied us to our quarters, one of the buildings adjoining the palace, where we found every thing in readiness for our arrival ; and there I, to my surprise, discovered that a most sumptuous supper awaited me—a politeness I was utterly a stranger to, not being over cognizant of the etiquette and privilege which await the officer on guard at a royal palace.

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